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PANEL ON INFORMATION REFERRAL PROJECTS IN LIBRARIES

EDITORS' NOTE ON THE PANEL

Neither Brenda Dervin nor Robert Croneberger delivered the talks they submitted prior to the conference, and which are included in this volume. Their reactions to previous sessions motivated them to put aside prepared speeches and address themselves to a problem which had been ignored by the conference up to that point. They felt that the participants had been given no conception of the commitment in human terms required by the operation of information centers.

While the statistics on the need for neighborhood information centers and the structure necessary for setting them up are important, it is a vain effort if the people cannot be reached. Dervin and Croneberger felt that too often librarians use the "do-gooder" approach, not purposely, but because they are what they are—middle class people trying to help others while pushing their own values and way of life. They tried to express the "gut level" commitment necessary to reach poor people. To build people's trust means really listening as well as talking to them, it means understanding what their life is and accepting them as human beings. It is a two-way street; librarians may have something to give—information—but they learn something valuable about involvement and caring in the process.

If a library staff, or at the very least the staff of a neighborhood information center, cannot accept total commitment to the community they have chosen to serve, they should probably direct their efforts toward some other kind of library service.

As a result of the questions posed by and to the panel, the conference participants formed three groups to discuss the major problems facing those planning to build and maintain neighborhood information centers. The three groups and the aspect of the problem they chose to discuss are listed below:

Credibility—How can we convince the people of the validity and believability of an information service through its staff, sponsor, and the information dispersed?

Advocacy—How much of an advocacy role can and should a library-based information center accept?

Flexibility—How can an information center offer service flexible enough to meet the variety and seriousness of people's needs?